Herodotus' Journal of the Human and Social Sciences	Volume :10 / N°:03 (2026), p 21-36

The Role of Social Structures in Building a Shared Identity between Africa and Asia over History

البنى الاجتماعية ودورها في بناء الهوية المشتركة بين أفريقيا وآسيا عبر التاريخ

Dr. Mounia ZOUGAIE*	Dr. Fouzia SAHI
Orcid:0009-0002-2557-5380	Orcid:0009-0007-1922-2921
University of Adrar (Algeria)	University of Blida (Algeria)
Email: mou.zougaie@univ-adrar.edu.dz	Email: sahifouzia@yahoo.fr

Received 14…/05../2026 Accepted 12../09…./2026

- **Abstract:**

This study examines the role of social structures in enhancing civilised communication and shaping a shared identity between Africa and Asia over history. After establishing the theoretical framework and conducting a sociological analysis of the role of these social structures in forming a common identity, we concluded that the African tribe and the Asian family were not merely internal social units; rather, they were institutions of external interaction that helped organise relations and host merchants. Religion, especially Islam, also played a unifying role in strengthening ties, and the Arabic language, which facilitated cultural and intellectual exchange. In addition, trade across the Sahara Desert and the Indian Ocean, as well as migration and intermarriage, had a profound impact on integrating the two regions, giving identity a renewable character. This indicates the role of social structures in shaping a shared identity and highlights their significance in confronting global challenges. It also calls for rereading history from a social and cultural perspective.

Keywords: Social structures, shared identity, civilised communication, Africa, Asia.

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الورقة الدور الذي أسهمت به البنى الاجتماعية في التواصل الحضاري وتشكيل الهوية المشتركة بين قارة أفريقيا وآسيا عبر التاريخ. فبعد التأسيس النظري، ثمّ التّحليل السّوسيولوجي لدور تلك البنى الاجتماعية في الهوية المشتركة، خلصنا إلى أنّ القبيلة في أفريقيا والعائلة في آسيا، لم يكونا مجرد وحدات اجتماعية داخلية؛ بل كانتا مؤسستان للتفاعل الخارجي في تنظيم العلاقات واستقبال التّجار. كما كان للدّين – خاصّة الإسلام – دور جامع في تعزيز الرّوابط، ومن خلال اللغة العربية التي أضفت على وظيفتها التّواصلية مزية التّبادل الثّقافي والفكري. إضافة لما سبق، كان للتّجارة عبر الصّحراء الكبرى والمحيط الهندي، وللهجرات والزّواج المختلط، أثر بالغ في التّقارب، مما أضفى على الهوية طابعًا متجدّدًا. وهذا مؤشر قوي على دور البنى الاجتماعية في الهوية المشتركة، وعامل يعزّز من دورهما في مواجهة التّحديات العالمية، ويستدعي استقراء التّاريخ من منظور اجتماعي وثقافي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البنى الاجتماعية؛ الهوية المشتركة؛ التّواصل الحضاري؛ قارة أفريقيا؛ قارة آسيا.

* *Corresponding author*

• Introduction

The historical and civilised relationship that linked the African and Asian continents is the most complex form of human interconnectedness in ancient and medieval history. This relationship was not founded solely on temporary material interests; rather, it was built upon solid structural foundations shaped by human interactions over thousands of years. What distinguishes this relationship is that it was not the product of top-down political decisions or imperial expansions. However, it emerged from the traditional social structures that characterised the peoples of both continents. In this context, the tribe and clan in Africa, and the extended family system with craft and commercial guilds in Asia, played a central role in shaping a form of cross-border popular diplomacy.

These social units, often described in anthropological studies as closed entities, proved throughout Afro-Asian history to be open systems capable of accommodating newcomers and integrating them into their local social fabric. This transformed the ports of East Africa and the oases of the Sahara Desert into places for a shared identity that transcended the duality of self and other.

Taking a closer look at the mechanisms of this civilised interaction reveals that religion, especially Islam, forms the spiritual and legal umbrella that granted social interactions legitimacy and a universal character. Through a system of shared values, psychological barriers between the Asian merchant and the African society gradually disappeared. The Arabic language also emerged as a cognitive, commercial, and legal tool of communication.

This dynamic, supported by complex trade networks from the Indian Ocean basin to Africa, led to the emergence of unique lifestyles, artistic forms, and architectural expressions. These reflected a state of acculturation that did not ignore original identities, but rather enriched them with new elements. Obviously, this can be seen in the blending of Islamic arts with local spirit, and in the rise of scholars and travellers who carried knowledge and exchanged ideas between the two continents.

However, this historical trajectory was ruptured with the advent of the colonial era. It not only exploits resources but also worked to dismantle natural social ties and replace them with African and Asian “Sykes-Picot” borders. This led to a decline in awareness of this shared identity in favour of narrow national identities or dependency on the Western centre. Today, in light of rapid global transformations and the advance of globalisation, aiming to standardise cultures according to purely material criteria, there is an urgent need to reread this social heritage from a critical sociological perspective. Afro-Asian identity is not merely a historical memory preserved in books; it is a living social structure with the flexibility to adapt to the conditions of the modern age.

Based on what has been mentioned, this research asks a question that goes beyond historical description: To what extent can traditional social structures be integrated into the other and revived today, shaping a shared Afro-Asian identity? Can this historical identity be transformed into an

alternative strategy for South-South cooperation that ensures a position within the global order and confronts the dominance of unilateral models?

1. Key Concepts of the Study

1.1. Social Structures

In language, structure refers to the arrangement upon which a construction is based. It is derived from the verb *(banā)*, meaning to build something and to join its parts in an organised manner. Thus, it has a normative meaning, as the structure of a thing is its composition, and it may also refer to the structure of society or personality[1]. Terminologically, it is "the stable system of social relations, organisations, and institutions that shape society and determine the roles of its individuals.[2]".

In this research, the concept of structure is applied to the tribe and the family, which are entities that organise social interaction and characterise ancient Afro-Asian society, thereby forming a distinctive social structure. Structure, in its derived meanings, implies cohesion, solidarity, and unity.

1.2. Shared Identity

Linguistically, the word *identity* derives from the pronoun "he" (*huwa*). It refers to the essence of a thing that distinguishes it from others. *Shared* means the similarity and commonality that exist between two or more parties. It also emerged in opposition to the "other"; whoever belongs is included within the context and concept of identity, whereas whoever stands outside it is considered the other.

Terminologically, it means a set of cultural, historical, and emotional characteristics shared by different human groups, generating among them a sense of common belonging despite geographical distance[3]. Identity is also defined as: "an entity, existence, and a historical and civilised given of peoples. It is based on religion, language, history, and heritage"[4].

1.3. Civilised Communication

Initially, the term civilised communication is composed of two words: communication and civilisation. Linguistically, communication derives from the verb to connect, which is the opposite of separation, and means linkage and contact. Terminologically, it is "an expression of the

---

[1]- Anthony Giddens, Sociology, translated by Fayez Al-Siyagh, Arab Organisation for Translation, Beirut, 2005, p.112.

[2]- Cherif Bouchahdane et al., Educational Concepts between Heritage and Modern Linguistic Studies, Publications of the Laboratory of Linguistics and Arabic Language, University of Annaba, 2009, p. 49

[3]- Ali Mazrui, Africans: A Triple Heritage, Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1986, p. 45.

[4]- Abdessalem Mseddi, Arab Identity and Linguistic Security, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut, 1st ed., 2014, p. 249.

relationships between individuals; that is, the transfer of a certain idea or specific meaning from the mind of one person to the mind of another. Through communication, interaction among individuals takes place"[1]. Communication is "the fundamental component in building social interaction"[2].

As for civilisation, it refers to settling in urban areas and advancing in thought and civility. It is "the process of mutual interaction between different civilisations, which leads to the transfer of ideas, values, and goods, resulting in cultural cross-exchange that enriches the participating parties"[3].

1.4. Cultural Integration

As the concept of cultural integration has not been precisely defined across the terminology of the fields that share it, it is clarified for the study as follows. Linguistically, it derives from the verb to merge; one says: a thing merged into another, meaning it became firmly connected with it. It is linked to culture since it is the body of sciences, knowledge, and arts that people share or believe in. Therefore, it is "the process through which diverse groups adopt common cultural elements (such as religion and language), while preserving some of their particularities, thereby creating a harmonious social fabric"[4].

Cultural integration has many factors. Intermarriage, for example, plays a major role in cultural integration, as it is "the social and legal bond that arises between two families or two different tribes as a result of marriage, and it plays a decisive role in neglecting ethnic differences and promoting biological and social integration"[5].

2. The Impact of Social Structures on the Shared Identity between Africa and Asia

2.1. Traditional Structures and Mechanisms of Civilised Interaction

Social structures are the foundational infrastructure upon which the diverse modes of Afro-Asian communication were built throughout historical eras. Understanding the shared identity requires analysing these social units (the tribe and the family) as dynamic systems that facilitated movement across oceans and deserts and helped establish a cohesive way of life. These structures are represented in the following forms:

---

[1]- Abdelkader Al-Ghazali, Linguistics and Communication Theory: Roman Jakobson as a Model, Dar Al-Hiwar for Publication and Distribution, Syria, 1st ed., 2003, p.18.

[2]- Salah Abdelhamid, New Media, Dar Atfalna for Publication and Distribution, Algeria, 1st ed., 2015, p.11.

[3]- Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, Dar Annahar for Publication, Beirut, 1991, p.88.

[4]- Jemaa Badi, Cultural Relations between Arabs and Africa, Dar Al-Maaref, Cairo, 1980, p.132.

[5]- Cherif Abdel Cherif, Zanzibar under the Busaidi Rule, Curzon Press, London, 1987, p. 114.

2.1.1. The Tribal System

A- Sociology of the African Tribe and the Open Assimilation System: Unlike Western ethnocentric views that confine the African tribe to closed primitivism, contemporary anthropological analyses have highlighted the tribe as a flexible political and social institution. It has been suggested that African tribal systems were based on equilibrium through conflict and assimilation. Therefore, the tribal structure possessed inherent mechanisms for integrating outsiders, which enhanced its demographic and economic stability.

B- Customary Citizenship: In eastern coast societies (such as the Bantu) and West Africa (such as the Mandingo), belonging to the tribe did not depend on blood purity as much as it rested on loyalty and contribution. This concept enabled Asian merchants and scholars to enter the tribal fabric as active members. Ali Mazrui points out that the African tribe is characterised by horizontal elasticity, which is the ability to expand by incorporating external (Asian) elements without losing its tribal identity, but rather enriching it with new components[1].

C- The Chieftain as a Diplomatic Guarantor: Chieftains acted as cultural intermediaries when Asian merchants arrived at ports or oases, where they were under the protection of the chieftain while being required to respect the strict customs of African hospitality. This relationship developed from temporary protection into permanent social adoption, transforming the tribal homeland into a bond of intellectual and commercial partnership.

2.1.2. The Family System

A- Asian Family Solidarity: In some parts of Asia, especially the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent, the social structure was based on the extended family, which was considered a social institution that transcended geographical borders.

B- The Family Network as a Tool of Transcontinental Communication: Albert Hourani explains that the Asian merchant did not move as an individual; rather, he paved the way for his family. The social system distributed members of the same family among the ports of India, the Gulf, and the coasts of Africa to ensure continuity of identity and dual loyalty[2]. This dispersion created a single social homeland extending across the ocean, where one family could be found living in Hadramout and Zanzibar at the same time. As a result, Afro-Asian identity became visible in the finest details of everyday life.

C- Structural Compatibility between Family Solidarity and Tribalism: Habib Al-Lawati notes that these families carried with them the system of social solidarity in the Khaldounian sense, yet it did not oppose the African tribe; rather, it harmonised with it. This was because both systems

---

[1]- Ali Mazrui, Africans: A Triple Heritage, previous reference, p.142.

[2]- Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, previous reference, p. 278.

valued patriarchy, respect for elders, and group cohesion over individualism, thereby creating a common sociological ground that paved the way for peaceful integration[1].

2.1.3. Structural Interpenetration of Intermarriage, Loyalty, and Adoption

Looking for a unified identity led the concerned parties to move beyond mere coexistence or what sociologists describe as structural cohesion through pragmatic mechanisms, including:

A- Strategic Intermarriage: It was the strongest tool for building identity. The marriage of Asian merchants and scholars to the daughters of African tribal leaders was not a casual union, but rather a political and social contract. Cherif Abdel Cherif points out that this type of intermarriage produced the Swahili class, a community possessing both Asian and African ancestry, speaking a hybrid language, and adopting shared values. This made it the backbone of Afro-Asian identity throughout history[2].

B- Clanship and Adoption: In the absence of a central authority, the African tribe often adopted the Asian migrant and granted him its name and status. This symbolic adoption transformed the Asian into an African through belongings. This explains the existence of families in both East and West Africa bearing African tribal names (such as Mandingo or Songhai) despite their evident Asian ancestry. Conversely, some Africans carried Asian family surnames, which may be attributed to social loyalty and affiliation.

C- Intermarriage and the Creation of the Hybrid Human: Intermarriage represented the biological seal of shared identity and the mechanism that prevented ethnic conflict. Marriage functioned as a contract of cultural settlement; thus, the marriage of Asians to African women was not merely an individual act but a social strategy to ensure acceptance and integration. Albert Hourani analyses how this form of marriage contributed to the rise of the Swahili elite. A child born from such a union combined the prestige of Asian lineage with the indigenous rights of African land. This new generation led civilised transformation and made it impossible to separate the two components in cities, such as Zanzibar, Lamu, and Mogadishu[3].

As a result of centuries of intermarriage, visible ethnic distinctions gradually faded. In his memoirs, Ibn Battuta notes that the sultans and notables of the African coast combined in their appearance and behaviour traits of Arabs, Persians, and Africans, making society appear as one harmonious whole. This biological integration shattered the idea of racial purity in favour of a shared identity[4].

---

[1]- Habib Al-Lawati, Civilised Communication between Oman and East Africa, Dar Al-Farqad, Damascus, 2010, p.95.

[2]- Cherif Abdel Cherif, Zanzibar under the Busaidi Rule, previous reference, p.110.

[3]- Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, previous reference, p. 348.

[4]- Ibn Battuta, Tuhfat Al-Nothar fi Gharaib al-Amsar, Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, p.345.

D- Guesthouses and Markets as Places for Integration: The material structures of society (houses and markets) evolved into arenas for expressing these social ties. Housing in urban centres, such as Lamu and Timbuktu, was architecturally designed to embody this fusion. Outer spaces were allocated for receiving and integrating strangers, while inner spaces reflected family hierarchies that harmoniously blended Asian privacy with African openness. The market did not function merely as a place of trade; it also served as a social parliament where alliances were forged between African tribes and Asian families, culminating in the establishment of a shared identity.

2.2. The Cultural and Spiritual Structures of the Shared Afro-Asian Presence

The study of the shared identity between Africa and Asia cannot be complete without analysing the soft powers that connect them. If trade linked bodies and interests, religion and language linked minds and souls. Religions are not merely metaphysical beliefs; they are drivers of economic and social behaviour. Within the Afro-Asian sphere, Islam and the Arabic language functioned as a kind of civilised internet centuries before the modern age.

2.2.1. Islam

Islam should not be described as a foreign religion imposed on the African continent; rather, it should be viewed as an initiative that contributed to the comprehensive restructuring of social frameworks. It provided the following:

A- The Sociology of the Nation and the Dissolution of Ethnicity: Before the rise of Islam, personal relations in Africa and Asia were often governed by tribal solidarity based on blood ties. The introduction of the concept of *nation* enabled the emergence of a new association known as the bond of faith. This paradigm shift allowed the Asian merchant to integrate into Hausa or Mandingo communities not as a stranger, but as a brother. Islam also granted Africans a universal identity, strengthening the sense of belonging to an entity stretching from Java to Timbuktu, while reducing ethnic and regional divisions.

B- Commercial and Legal Protocols of Sharia: In the absence of a central authority that unifies the two continents, Islamic law served as a form of international law. When an Omani or Persian merchant arrived at the ports of Mogadishu or Kilwa, he encountered a familiar judicial system. Contracts, treaties, and inheritance matters were resolved based on a common legal reference. Albert Hourani stated that this legal harmony created a zone of trust, in which the judge in any African coastal city represented a social guarantee for the arriving Asian merchant, encouraging permanent settlement rather than temporary visits[1].

2.2.2. Arabic and Hybrid Languages

[1]- Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, previous reference, p. 315.

Language went beyond being a communication tool; however, it became a means of shared collective values. The religious value of Arabic strengthened this role, as it was "a highly influential symbol used uniquely in spreading Islam"[1].

A- Arabic as a Language of Intellectual Advancement: Arabic played a great role in shaping identity. It is "the primary guarantor of identity, and the only one capable of preventing integration and disappearance into foreign culture"[2]. Thus, Arabic became the language of the elite and sovereignty in the African context, where correspondence between the sultans of Songhai, Ottoman caliphs, and the kings of Morocco was conducted in this language. Studies indicate that Arabic effectively reduced Africa's cultural isolation. The intellectuals of Timbuktu engaged with the same literary works studied in Baghdad or Nishapur. This epistemological homogeneity facilitated the formation of a collective identity, as Afro-Asian thought increasingly drew from a shared knowledge.

B- The Genius of Hybrid Languages: Hybrid languages, such as Swahili, Hausa, and Wolof, were the social outcomes of this cultural fusion. For example, Swahili is not merely Arabic vocabulary in an African form, but a complete linguistic identity. Cherif Abdel Cherif confirms that the emergence of such integrated languages was not coercive, but rather a structural fusion in which the new Afro-Asian society required a new language to express its dual reality. Therefore, Swahili was the sociological solution to this interpenetration[3].

2.2.3. Sufism and Education

Sufi methods and learning centres play a great role in transmitting culture to both continents.

A- The Zawiya as an Institution of Social Security: The Sufi lodge (*zawiya*), such as the Qadiriyya or Tijaniyya, in Africa was connected to its centres in Asia and created Sufi citizenship. Asian travellers found in the African zawiya shelter, food, and protection as they would in their homeland. Ali Al-Mazrui emphasises that this spiritual bond was stronger than political borders, making the shared identity a reality beyond material interests[4].

B- The Journey in Search of Knowledge: Historically, the scholarly centres of Timbuktu and Djenne attracted intellectuals from the Hejaz and Yemen. Conversely, student scholarships from Africa to Al-Azhar University or Mecca were continuous. This exchange not only transferred knowledge but also shared customs, clothing, and architectural styles. African scholars were not

---

[1]- Nicholas Ostler, Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World, trans. Mohamed Toufik Al-Boujairami, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut, 2011, p.49.

[2]-Gilbert Guillaume, Language, Power, and Society in the Maghreb, trans. Mohamed Aslim, Afrique Orient, Beirut, 2011, p.33.

[3]- Cherif Abdel Cherif, Zanzibar under the Busaidi Rule, previous reference, p. 140.

[4]- Ali Al-Mazrui, Africans: A Triple Heritage, previous reference, p.141.

merely followers; they were partners in Islamic knowledge production, thereby granting the shared identity equality and mutual respect.

2.2.4. Pilgrimage Journeys and Settlement

A- The Hajj Season and Collective Memory: The pilgrimage to Mecca represented the most significant social gatherings in human history and played an effective role in strengthening these ties. There is no place where Muslims of all nationalities, languages, and colours gather more than during the Hajj season.

B- Royal Journeys and Foundational Narratives: The pilgrimage of Mansa Moussa, ruler of Mali in the fourteenth century, went beyond religious ritual. It was a display of Afro-Asian identity. He was accompanied by thousands of Africans and returned with Asian scholars, including Andalusian architects who built mosques throughout Africa and blended different cultural traditions. These journeys generated a memory that is alive among the peoples of both continents to this day.

C- Reciprocal Settlement and Neighbouring Communities: The Hajj accelerated the emergence of African communities that settled in the Hejaz, Levant, and Iraq, alongside Asian communities that returned with pilgrims and settled in Africa. This exchange made the shared identity both biological and geographical, as Afro-Asian heritage flows through the veins of millions in both regions.

2.3. Economic Structures, Trade Movement, and Commercial Migrations

While social structures provided the framework and religion transmitted the spiritual dimension of identity, trade infused this identity with dynamism and vitality. Interactions between Africa and Asia went beyond the exchange of goods (such as gold, ivory, and spices); they represented a process of biological and social reconfiguration of individuals across the two continents. Sociologists argue that transoceanic trade generates a global economy, which inevitably leads to comprehensive social integration.

2.3.1. Anthropology of Trade Routes

Trade routes served as geographical pathways that created sociological locations where differences were effectively reduced.

A- The Indian Ocean and the Sociology of Monsoon Winds: The monsoon winds highly impacted the shaping of identity. Asian merchants, including Omanis, Hadramis, and Indians, did not merely go through Africa; they were compelled to stay for four to six months while waiting for wind direction. This residence transformed the merchants from being transient travellers into temporary citizens, facilitating interaction with locals, the establishment of settlements, and the development of deep social relationships. Thus, seasonal stability generated the distinctive urban fabric that characterises Swahili cities. The market evolved into a social parliament where alliances between the two continents were formed.

B- Caravan Routes: In West Africa, caravan networks connected North Africa and Asia with the kingdoms of Western Sudan. These caravans transported salt and gold, but also carried models of living, social organisation, and cultural practices. Ali Al-Mazrui notes that these routes created cultural continuity, in which the boundaries between purely African and Asian migrants gradually faded in desert cities, such as Chinguetti and Timbuktu[1].

2.3.2. "Rooted" Migrations and the Integrative Settlement Model

In contrast to Western colonial migrations, which often established barriers for the indigenous populations, Asian migrations to Africa were largely integrative movements.

A- Hadrami and Omani Migration: Studies confirm that the Arabian Peninsula's migrants established themselves in Africa as homeowners rather than colonisers. They brought with them commercial agency frameworks and family networks, but adapted them with African tribal structures. This convergence facilitated the emergence of major business houses, which included Africans and Asians working under a unified system of loyalty. Hence, they formed a collective identity as an expression of stability.

B- Indian Migration and Material Acculturation: Migrations from the Indian subcontinent, particularly from Gujarat, significantly contributed to the spread of crafts, textiles, and architectural methods. These influences did not remain isolated; rather, they intersected with African skills, producing a shared identity in clothing, such as the kitenge textile and the kanzo garment, as well as in complex architectural styles. This tangible convergence created a shared identity experienced in everyday spaces, such as dining places and domestic aesthetics.

2.3.3. Commercial Aristocracy and Shared Loyalty

Commercial aristocracy was perceived as a new social class due to trade and assimilation. This elite group, represented by the Shirazi in East Africa or the Ashraf in its western regions, maintained communication networks stretching from India to the deepest parts of the African forest. They acted as guarantors of stability by investing in the construction of mosques, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities. Therefore, the locals perceived this shared identity as a source of security and prosperity.

3. The Material Structures of the Shared Identity between Africa and Asia

3.1. Sociology of the Coastal City

Coastal cities in Africa, such as Zanzibar, Lamu, Mogadishu, and Kilwa, were centres of commercial exchange. They were hybrid social entities formed from Afro-Asian interactions. They include the following manifestations:

---

[1]- Ali Al-Mazrui, Africans: A Triple Heritage, previous reference, p.178.

A- The Shared Urban Space: These cities had an urban design embodying a dual identity, reflected in their narrow alleys, inner courtyards, and Arab and Persian architectural influences. The building materials used, especially coral stone, testified to the African environment. The Swahili house represented a social unit where extended families of different ethnic backgrounds coexisted under one roof, thereby transforming the entire city into one large family that transcended the concept of alienation.

B- The Market as a Space of Daily Acculturation: The market functioned as a sphere of everyday cultural exchange. Within the markets of these urban centres, class and ethnic distinctions were outwardly dissolved. The Indian Banyan merchant, the African farmer, and the Omani sailor coexisted within a unique economic environment that required a common language and a collective value of honesty. Through this daily interaction, a social identity was shaped in the mundane aspects of existence, far removed from the conflicts of political elites.

3.2. Anthropology of Material Culture

Material culture is a more precise indicator of social cohesion than historical texts.

A- Afro-Asian Cuisine as Evidence of Integration: Indian spices, such as curry and turmeric, were integrated with Persian and Arab cooking techniques, as well as African foods, including coconut, bananas, and fish. This convergence led to a distinctive shared-identity cuisine. For example, the dining table in East Africa reflects the convergence between the two continents, where culinary practices express recognition of the other and the incorporation of cultural differences into everyday life aspects.

B- Clothing as a Symbol of Belonging: Clothing evolved to symbolise this hybrid identity. African men wore the *kanzo* (a caftan of Asian origin), complemented by the *kofia*, a locally embroidered cap, while women wore the *khanga* or *leso*, whose patterns reflected hybrid languages. This integration in outward appearance strengthened a sense of cohesion, reduced feelings of ethnic categorisation, and reinforced a collective sense of a shared self.

3.3. Intermarriage within the Intermediate Elite (Notables)

Due to prolonged processes of assimilation, a new social class formed under the name of the aristocracy or notables, who led the commercial cities. Intermarriage contributed to integration through the following aspects:

A- Dual Leadership and Loyalty to the Land: These elites did not feel loyalty to Asia at the expense of Africa; rather, they felt themselves as guardians of this blend. They invested the wealth generated from trade in building charitable endowments, including schools, wells, and mosques, which led local African tribes to regard them as part of their social entity. Habib Al-Lawati confirms that this class prevented the collapse of Afro-Asian identity before the Portuguese because

the resistance was not ethnic in nature; rather, it was a shared identity defending its historical existence[1].

B- Dissolving the Concept of the Other: Through assimilation, it was difficult in coastal urban centres or in sub-Saharan cities (such as Timbuktu) to distinguish the foreigner from the native inhabitant. Therefore, identity shifted from being a biological trait, such as colour or race, to a cultural and social characteristic, including language, religion, and belonging to the land.

4- The Role of the Afro-Asian Identity in Confronting Contemporary Global Challenges

This section summarises the phase of severe testing faced by the shared identity after centuries of integration, when the Afro-Asian region was subjected to harsh problems aimed at transforming it into a fragmented geography serving colonial interests.

4.1. Geographical Challenges and Borders

A- The Colonial Rupture and the Fragmentation of Geography: The colonial ambitions of European powers, particularly the United Kingdom, France, and Portugal, represented not only military domination but also a systematic project to eradicate identity and dismantle shared social structures.

B- The Shock of Artificial Borders: Artificial borders were drawn by colonial powers, such as those established during the Berlin Conference, to divide Africa, which cut the historical communication forever. Suddenly, the Omani merchant in Zanzibar became a foreigner within Tanzania. Political and customs barriers separated Muslims in West Africa from their counterparts in the North. Thus, colonialism transformed the Indian Ocean from a shared social lake into closed international borders, leading to the contraction of Afro-Asian identity and the reduction of its prominent role.

4.2. Challenges of Identity, Cultural Globalisation, and Standardisation

After the end of military colonialism, the Afro-Asian identity faced the challenge of globalisation, which seeks to fuse local identities into a single consumerist model.

A- The Replacement of Indigenous Legal Systems: Colonialism weakened the role of Islamic law and tribal customs, which had long represented the social contract between the two continents, and replaced them with European positive laws. This transformation marginalised the intermediate elite (scholars and notables) who had ensured the stability of the shared identity, and turned the relationship from a civilised partnership into economic dependency on the European centre.

---

[1]- Habib Al-Lawati, Civilised Communication between Oman and East Africa, previous reference, p.95.

B- The Challenge of Westernisation and the Alienation of Generations: Anthony Giddens explains how globalisation uproots identities from their spatial roots. In this context, younger generations in Africa and Asia began to distance themselves from their hybrid languages (Swahili) and traditional social values (solidarity) in favour of Western individualism. This process of cultural standardisation threatens the Afro-Asian particularity that was built over thousands of years[1].

4.3. Prospects for Strengthening the Shared Identity and Confronting Globalisation

A- Cultural Resistance and Renewed Awareness: Despite the influence of globalisation, contemporary identity-revival movements are gaining momentum. There has been a renewed affirmation of religion, language, shared culinary traditions, and the arts as forms of non-violent resistance to protect the cultural self. The resilience of the Afro-Asian identity lies in its inherent flexibility. This identity is capable of absorbing globalisation and reinterpreting it through a local lens (*glocality*).

B- Enduring Evidence of Communication

Despite efforts to fragment, material culture has remained evidence of a unified identity. It confirms the impossibility of separating its two constituent elements.

In terms of urban heritage, cities (such as Lamu, Timbuktu, and Zanzibar) still stand as testimonies to hybrid architecture. The incorporation of Islamic and Asian decorative motifs into the African mosques goes beyond artistic expression and constitutes a declaration of identity. This architectural form embodies a collective unconsciousness that rejects estrangement and affirms that the spatial spheres of the two continents form a unique extension.

In the arts, Afro-Asian musical traditions, such as *tarab* in East Africa and *liwa* rhythms in the Gulf, provide evidence of the blending of souls. These artistic expressions function as a universal language that political borders have failed to suppress, and each performance revives the shared identity anew.

C- Future Prospects toward a Civilised Grouping: Among the future prospects is the "South-South" strategy, through which Africa and Asia can effectively confront contemporary challenges by returning to the historical model of integration. The revival of the new maritime routes (Silk Road) and the activation of the African Continental Free Trade Area represent a renewal of old social structures with a modern economic centre.

Another prospect is the shared values as a humane alternative. In the context of Western modernity crises, the Afro-Asian identity, rooted in family, spiritual, and communal values, offers a model of balanced human existence. Recovering this shared identity is not a retreat into the past, but rather the construction of a multi-polar future that strengthens social diversity.

---

[1]- Anthony Giddens, Sociology, previous reference, p.117.

- ## Conclusion

The study concluded that the shared identity between Africa and Asia was not merely an outcome of utilitarian trade exchange; rather, it was the embodiment of deep structural integration rooted in historical and social foundations. The results can be drawn as follows:

-The analysis demonstrated that the African tribe and the Asian family formed a flexible system that broke the barriers of foreignness through mechanisms of adoption and intermarriage, and transformed the newcomer into a native member within the local social fabric.

-The social cohesion between the two peoples created a hybrid identity that had both the right to the land and the prestige of lineage. This cohesion was further strengthened through spiritual motives.

-Islam and the Arabic language played the role of a sociological network that unified legal concepts and moral values, and transformed the region extending from the coasts of the Indian Ocean to the edges of the Sahara Desert into a Zone of Trust.

-Despite the problems caused by the colonial rupture through artificial borders, and the stereotyping attempts promoted by contemporary globalisation, the evidence found in architecture and hybrid languages (such as Swahili and Hausa) remains a resilient memory resisting disappearance. It confirms that Afro-Asian identity is a civilised entity possessing sufficient flexibility to reshape itself in modern contexts, away from the Western conflicts.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, a set of recommendations is made to strengthen those ties in the contemporary era:

-Activating the principle of heritage diplomacy by investing in shared cultural and spiritual elements as soft power to develop political and economic South-South partnerships, and to overcome the legacy of colonial borders.

-Strengthening academic ties through specialised research centres in Afro-Asian studies that are concerned with documenting manuscripts, protecting intermediary languages, and studying the anthropology of coastal communities.

-Reviving historical trade routes by drawing inspiration from the Silk Road and caravan routes to build modern economic blocs that restore the role of local communities and make trade a means of social integration rather than mere transient consumption.

-Protecting identity from stereotyping by enhancing Afro-Asian culture in educational curricula and media, while remaining vigilant against the risks of dissolution into the single cultural model imposed by globalisation.

- **Bibliography:**

Books:

1- Abdelkader Al-Ghazali, Linguistics and Communication Theory: Roman Jakobson as a Model, Dar Al-Hiwar for Publication and Distribution, Syria, 1st ed., 2003.

2- Abdessalem Mseddi, Arab Identity and Linguistic Security, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut, 1st ed., 2014.

3- Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, Dar Annahar for Publication, Beirut, 1991.

4- Ali Mazrui, Africans: A Triple Heritage, Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1986.

5- Anthony Giddens, Sociology, translated by Fayez Al-Siyagh, Arab Organisation for Translation, Beirut, 2005.

6- Cherif Abdel Cherif, Zanzibar under the Busaidi Rule, Curzon Press, London, 1987.

7- Cherif Bouchahdane et al., Educational Concepts between Heritage and Modern Linguistic Studies, Publications of the Laboratory of Linguistics and Arabic Language, University of Annaba, 2009.

8- Gilbert Guillaume, Language, Power, and Society in the Maghreb, trans. Mohamed Aslim, Afrique Orient, Beirut, 2011.

9- Habib Al-Lawati, Civilised Communication between Oman and East Africa, Dar Al-Farqad, Damascus, 2010.

10- Ibn Battuta, Tuhfat Al-Nothar fi Gharaib al-Amsar, Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, Beirut.

11- Jemaa Badi, Cultural Relations between Arabs and Africa, Dar Al-Maaref, Cairo, 1980.

12- Nicholas Ostler, Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World, trans. Mohamed Toufik Al-Boujairami, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut, 2011.

13- Salah Abdelhamid, New Media, Dar Atfalna for Publication and Distribution, Algeria, 1st ed., 2015.